

Cpl. David Hernandez /U.S. Marine Corps



Members of a U.S. Marine Corps Female Engagement team on security patrol in Sangin Valley, Afghanistan.

# Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness

## Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

BY ROBERT EGNELL

In January 2013 then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta rather unexpectedly lifted the ban on women in combat roles. This came after more than a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan where women had distinguished themselves in many ways—not the least of which included combat. The debate on the implementation of this decision has since raged, raising questions about physical standards and the impact on unit cohesion, among other things. The last few years have also witnessed a necessary discussion about the outrageous frequency of sexual assaults within military organizations. These debates—for good and bad—have placed gender issues in relation to military organizations high on the agenda of public debate.

The importance of a gender perspective in peace operations and military affairs has long been established by feminist activists and researchers, and recognized in a number of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) on women, peace, and security. Indeed, UNSCR 1325, as well as the subsequent resolutions within the area of women, peace, and security (most notably 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960), has created an international framework for the implementation of a gender perspective in the pursuit of international security and the conduct of peace operations.<sup>1</sup> And whether military organizations are seen as hurdles or supporters in the pursuit of peace and security, they are impossible to overlook as key components in any strategy to promote women's rights or a gender perspective in security affairs. Moreover, the U.S. National Action Plan on

*Robert Egnell is a Professor of Leadership at the Swedish Defence University and a senior fellow at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security.*

Women, Peace, and Security loudly calls for such implementation.

One might expect such advocacy from the women's rights movement or civilian politicians. However, at the very same time, military organizations around the world are coming to the same conclusion based on experiences in the field of operations—not least in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of the need to address tactical level challenges, we have therefore witnessed a number of organizational innovations such as Team Lioness, Female Engagement Teams (FET), Cultural Support Teams (CST), Gender Field Advisors (GFS), and Gender Focal Points (GFP). Together, these innovative teams have sought to improve situational awareness and intelligence gathering by engaging local women, they have adapted order templates and impacted operational planning and execution, they have arranged female *jirgas* and executed projects in order to empower local women and improve their situation. In short, they have served as force multipliers within a context that often required their participation for maximized effectiveness. The jury is still out on the effectiveness and impact of these teams and advisors, but that should not distract us from the fact that they were not introduced as a politically correct nicety to please the women's movement, but as a direct result of operational necessities.

To further the discussion on gender in military affairs, this article discusses two questions: why should gender perspectives be introduced and implemented in military organizations? And how should this process be managed to do so successfully? Regardless of whether we agree that gender perspectives are important for military affairs or not, or if we simply obey the "orders" of the National

Action Plan (NAP), we are facing the challenge of implementing UNSCR 1325 in a vast organization with a culture that has traditionally been unkind to these perspectives. The process of implementation must therefore be approached as an uphill battle that will involve substantial resistance. The article draws on a major study of a similar process in Sweden that will serve to highlight general tactical choices, organizational hurdles, and policy implications for an international audience.<sup>2</sup>

To achieve these ends, a new interdisciplinary approach is necessary—one that connects gender perspectives and feminist scholarship with military theory and discussions of military effectiveness in both war and peace support operations. By marrying two previously separate fields of analysis and inquiry, this article not only makes an argument for the implementation of gender perspectives in the armed forces, but also addresses the more challenging question of how this process of change should be approached. The result of such processes are not only likely to lead to improved conditions for women around the world, but also increased effectiveness of military organizations employing force, or the threat of such force, to achieve political objectives.

This is, in other words, the smart thing to do, and the fact that it is also the right thing to do in terms of promoting gender equality and women's rights is useful, but is not central to the argument. The core task of military organizations is to fight and win the nation's wars and not to promote gender equality—and the organizational change process should therefore focus on these core tasks. That also means that the leadership of the implementation process should find its institutional home at the very heart of the military chain of command,

and as close to the core activities as possible—the joint staff and the combatant commands. While the integration of women in combat arms will be helpful, it is far from sufficient, and gender perspectives therefore need to be mainstreamed throughout the organization. Token women, gender advisors, or ad hoc female teams will simply not cut it.

### **Connecting Gender and Military Effectiveness**

Feminist perspectives and traditional military values are indeed often seen as confronting one another in a zero-sum game. Within this game, implementing a gender perspective or including women in combat units simultaneously means lowering military effectiveness and fighting power. At the same time, efforts to increase military effectiveness are generally viewed as a step back for women's rights by supporting the existing patriarchal system in which the logic of war and violence prevails. This zero-sum view is both inaccurate and unhelpful for everyone seeking to improve international security and stability. The two viewpoints have much to learn from each other, and there are plenty of synergies to be explored. Let us therefore explore how gender perspectives can positively influence military effectiveness, and then look at how military organizations can support the implementation of gender perspectives, women's rights, and participation as prescribed in UNSCR 1325 and the NAPs. First, however, a closer look at what military effectiveness means in the contemporary strategic context is necessary.

### **Military Effectiveness and Fighting Power in a Changing World**

An effective military organization is one that succeeds in performing the core tasks that the

political leadership asks of it. Traditionally, or ideally at least, this has meant fighting and winning conventional wars—and thereby defending the nation (or the constitution). The armed forces have therefore been organized, trained, and equipped, and have also developed a certain professional culture and ethos with the intention of maximizing their effectiveness in performing precisely that duty. The extreme nature of the task, or what the theorists of civil-military relations often refers to as the “functional imperative,” also means that military organizations have a right, and indeed a need, to be different from broader society.<sup>3</sup> Discipline, loyalty, strength, obedience, “warrior mindset,” and unit cohesion are just some aspects of this ethos that may sound arcane or even worrying to some civilians, but that from a professional military perspective are considered absolutely necessary for the effective application of violence in the midst of war.

The need to be different has also meant that certain developments in civil society such as increased individualism, racial and gender integration, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights have been avoided within military organizations. The question is nevertheless to what extent these civilian developments would actually harm the effectiveness of the organization. The integration of African Americans and the LGBT community turned out to be just fine—why would women in combat and the implementation of a gender perspective not also be fine, or even good, for the armed forces?

While conventional inter-state warfare can never be declared dead, it is nevertheless fair to say that in the contemporary context, different forms of complex stability and peace support operations, as well as limited wars, are the

most common military tasks. The aims of such military operations have changed from the pursuit of concrete military strategic objectives to the establishment of certain conditions from which political outcomes can be decided.<sup>4</sup> In this context, military activities often play a supporting role in so called “comprehensive,” “integrated,” or “whole of government” approaches and operations that involve a large number of actors and activities aimed at achieving more far-reaching political goals of stabilization, democratization, economic growth, and the implementation and maintenance of respect for human rights and the rule of law. Key tasks of military organizations in this environment therefore include the protection of civilians (PoC), including humanitarian and diplomatic activities, the establishment of order, and the prevention of sexual and gender based violence. The political

objectives are indeed the most important, and military organizations must not only operate to provide the platform from which civilian actors can achieve these aims—they must also take great care not to violate the principles that tend to govern the larger endeavor: respect for human rights, ideals of democratic governance, and gender equality.

In general, military theorists often describe military capability or “combat power” as a combination of physical factors (the means, meaning the size and materiel of the organization), conceptual factors (doctrine or the way the means are employed), and morale factors (the will of the soldiers). Within the debates about fighting power, traditional theories of military capability and effectiveness have often overemphasized physical military factors, such as troop numbers and the quality of equipment, while paying less attention to



Cpl. Mary E. Carlin/US Marine Corps

Combatives Tournament held in Monterey, California.



the more intangible factors that influence a state's capacity to use its material resources effectively—like morale, culture, education, and doctrine.<sup>5</sup> However, the many cases where the numerically and technologically inferior win battles and campaigns suggest that such explanations of military capability are misleading—especially when they fail to acknowledge the importance of the policies for which the military instrument is used.<sup>6</sup>

Where do gender perspectives and female soldiers and officers enter this equation? While one should be careful about assigning special capabilities to female soldiers and officers, this article argues that adding women to combat units, and a gender perspective to military operations more generally, has the potential to add new capabilities and thereby also improve the effectiveness of operations.<sup>7</sup>

To begin, women can play a role with regard to the means, the material factor. Including the large portion of women who are physically fit for military service in the armed forces allows societies to maximize the size of those forces. However, the emphasis on “lean and mean” organizations rather than mass in 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare means that the main potential contribution is more likely to lie in how and with what conviction armed forces conduct operations.

Adding a gender perspective has the potential to transform the traditional military paradigm by including and creating an increased understanding of the importance of non-traditional security issues. Looking at the strategic process without a sound understanding of all aspects of the conflict—such as the actors involved, the political climate, the local culture, the economic situation on the ground, etc.—it is very difficult to establish what objectives the military and civilian organizations

should pursue in the quest for the political aim.<sup>8</sup> A gender perspective casts a critical eye on an area of operations that involves the examination and understanding of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious practices; of how equality and inequality manifest themselves in the distribution of and access to resources and of decisionmaking power not just between rich and poor, but in all parts of society. Gendered dimensions of conflict can indeed be tremendously transformative by affecting *both* what the operation does and *how* it does it, in terms of its priorities and tactics. It affects the aims of operations, and expands the range of violence that must be addressed (including sexual violence and other violence directed at the civilian population, not just the violence of traditional warfare). Gender perspectives can also inform tactics, for example by shaping behavior along patrol routes, encouraging consultation with people in the local community, and so on.

Women can also provide specific competencies and perspectives that improve the conduct of operations. Women in combat units, as well as the implementation of a gender perspective in operations, clearly have the potential to increase the information gathering and analysis capability of units. Gaining access to local women not only allows a unit to develop a better understanding of local conditions and culture, it can also improve the unit's relationship with the community, its perceived legitimacy, and improve force protection of troops in the area of operations. The most obvious examples arise from Female or Mixed Engagement Teams, intelligence officers, cultural analysts, and interpreters who provide access to populations and areas that all-male units cannot engage or search. Another example is provided by the difficulty in achieving

civil-military coordination and cooperation in campaigns involving a broad set of actors. Male dominance of the military has been pointed to as one of the cultural features that create friction between military and humanitarian organizations.<sup>9</sup> Female liaison officers could potentially build bridges between the two sets of organizations.

The UN rightly emphasizes that female soldiers and gender perspectives are absolutely essential for certain tasks in peace operations where military and civilian aims and tasks overlap. As an example, they help address specific needs of female ex-combatants during the process of demobilization and reintegration into civilian life. They can interview survivors of gender-based violence, mentor female cadets at police and military academies, and, as highlighted above, they can interact with

women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, female soldiers can also serve as role models in the local environment by inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes. While these competencies may be dismissed as unrelated to a traditional view of military fighting power, they may prove essential in the complex operations of today.

There are also some commonly expressed challenges or concerns expressed in relation to the impact of women and gender perspectives. The first is the idea that women, in general, are not fit for war; that their often lower physical abilities and/or supposed lack of mental toughness put at risk the combat effectiveness of the units. The second is the idea that the



Sтивен Л. Шепард/Presidio of Monterey Public Affairs

Member of a U.S. Marine Corps Female Engagement Team watches over an Afghan girl while the girl's mother receives medical attention from another team member.

inclusion of women and gender perspectives will ruin unit cohesion and military culture.

In both cases, the problem with these concerns is that they assume that the existing standards are virtually perfect. Any change in standards or the way soldiers are trained and units formed, will therefore be perceived as a negative impact—especially if it is imposed by the political leadership. The issue of physical standards is nevertheless easily resolved by not making accommodations for women and maintaining the existing physical standards and tests. Let everyone who passed the requirements be eligible for the job. At the same time, any organization that wants to continue to evolve and improve should constantly seek ways of improving the existing standards and standard operating procedures—not least given the changing character of conflict and soldiering in the contemporary context. The Canadians completely threw out all old standards and started anew with a close look at the actual demands of the job in the field of operations, and then scientifically created standards and testing procedures based on that rather than tradition.

In terms of the more difficult debate about unit cohesion, there is very little data to fall back on. However, gender integration has existed in non-combat units for a long time and there are no reports indicating that it has had an impact on unit cohesion. Many other countries have also integrated combat units with a similar absence of negative reports. Outside the military sphere the business sector is reporting positive effects of integration and equality policies. Unit effectiveness measured in production increases, and companies with integrated boardrooms make more money. As a more general comment, it is rather suspicious to argue that the military has suddenly

arrived at the peak unit cohesion and that there is no room for change or improvement. Many traditional ways of training soldiers and units are already being thrown out—collective punishment, hazing, sexist and homophobic slurs. Again, no reports of decreases in unit cohesion can be found and one can only assume that professional drill sergeants have found new ways of achieving the same goals.

Finally, let us move into the realm of existing research on ground combat units. Professor Tony King is one of few who have studied and compared the impact of gender integration in different countries, with an eye on unit cohesion. He finds that in today's world of professional armies, it is not gender that determines cohesion, but training and competence. In other words, it is not the social cohesion of units that determines effectiveness, but rather a professional and more task-oriented form of cohesion. As long as women are competent and well-trained, they therefore do not effect unit cohesion negatively.<sup>11</sup>

While there are plenty of potential benefits to be reaped from the inclusion of female soldiers and gendered perspectives, this should not, however, be seen as a silver bullet or be overly exaggerated. The impact is not going to be revolutionary, and without first changing the mindset of commanders and planners, the importance of women's perspectives, information, and analyses is likely to be undervalued within a more traditional narrative. The impact is therefore likely to be limited until a more general mainstreaming of a gender perspective on operations is achieved, and even at that time it is still only one of many components that determine the effectiveness of an operation.



## Military Support of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

A closer look at UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security reveals that they are intended to be strategic frameworks for conducting more effective and sustainable peace negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and conflict resolution interventions by the international community. They encompass a range of complex issues, including judicial and legal reform (as part of state building), security sector reform, formal and informal peace negotiations, peacekeeping, political participation, and protection from and responses to sexual violence in armed conflict. UNSCR 1325 and four subsequent resolutions also under the umbrella of the women, peace, and security agenda (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) thereby lay out actions to be taken by governments, the United Nations and other international and national actors. Military organizations are at the very heart of this process. On the one hand they are seen as the “problem,” by virtue of being the perpetrator of violence against women and as maintainers of the existing patriarchal system. On the other hand, they are also called upon as protectors of women and civilians in violent conflicts. In other words, there is plenty of potential for substantial military contributions to the four main pillars of the resolutions on women, peace, and security:

Participation: This pillar speaks to the importance of full participation and inclusion of women (including civil society actors) in the decisionmaking and execution of activities related to peacemaking, post-conflict

reconstruction, and the prevention of conflict. Military organizations can support this process by working internally to ensure women’s full participation within their own ranks, as well as making sure that engagement with civil society and local leaders also includes and empowers women.

Protection: The protection of women and girls in armed conflict is an obvious military role that nevertheless requires profound understanding of gender perspectives to be effective. This would involve internal training of military personnel in the protection of women, including zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations, as well as making sure that gender becomes an integral part of advising and assisting, Security Sector Reform (SSR), and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes. Military organizations thereby have an opportunity to engage in both short-term protection, and more long-term activities that deal with the underlying reasons for the violence.

Prevention: The prevention of conflict-related sexual violence is a complex matter that requires changing the behavior of perpetrators. This may involve a range of activities depending on the nature of the perpetrator and reasons for the sexual violence. Preventing sexual violence used as a weapon of war requires changing the cost-benefit calculations of the perpetrating units by using force or the threat of force to deter such behavior. While such deterrence is ideally conducted by legal systems, in the midst of conflict it is often only the military that has the muscle to provide a convincing enough threat to change behavior. Addressing broader societal sexual violence

requires ending impunity by increasing the capacity of the justice system, as well as by changing the cultural values of the society. Protection of victims and witnesses may also be included in preventive activities. While these are not primarily military tasks, military organizations can serve as role models in how they treat women within the organization as well as in the local community.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the often different implications for women and men of any plans, policies, and activities of all actors involved. UNSCR 1325 calls for the systematic implementation of a gender perspective in peacekeeping and peacebuilding by all Member States, especially in the context of peace missions led by the UN.<sup>12</sup> The ultimate

goal of mainstreaming is often described as achieving gender equality. This is slightly problematic for military organizations that emphasize the need to be different to ensure effectiveness in their core tasks. However, as described above, mainstreaming gender throughout the organization also has great positive potential in terms of supporting the analysis, planning, and execution of operations. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout military organizations, both at home and in partner countries, is likely to serve as an important signal to the broader society. If women can make substantial contributions to what is surely the most masculine and patriarchal world of all, there are few limits left in terms of women's participation and empowerment in other sectors of society.



Spc. Kristina Truock/US Army

A U.S. Army Sergeant writes down information from a local woman at the Woman's Center near the Zhari District Center, Kandahar province, Afghanistan.

In sum, there are a number of different ways that a gender perspective has the potential to not only alleviate the negative impact of war for women, and to improve women's participation and empowerment in society, but also to affect military effectiveness positively, primarily with regard to how force is applied to achieve political aims. There are also a number of potential benefits of a gender perspective that bear less relation to traditional views of military effectiveness, but that may have an important impact on operations as a whole. Examples would be supporting women's participation and status in the society, and building the foundation for representative governance and security structures and thus improving the quality of governance and development. Let us therefore leave the question of *why* this should be done, to instead focus on the equally challenging question of *how* this process should be undertaken.

### Approaches to the Implementation Process

The only realistic starting point when attempting to integrate gender perspectives in military organizations is to first understand that we are dealing with a deeply skeptical organization that is likely to produce strong resistance. However, experience from countries like Sweden and the Netherlands indicate that this is not an impossible sell if the process is introduced and managed in a way that speaks to the core tasks of military organizations.<sup>13</sup> This section discusses a number of tactical considerations in the implementation process, and simultaneously addresses a number of debates within feminist theory.

The most challenging task is to gain access to the organization, to begin the work. This is closely related to the issue of how the process

and its aims are described and communicated. Feminists often approach the integration of women and gender perspectives in military organizations as "the right thing to do." The aim of such a process would focus on UNSCR 1325 and speak of increased women's participation and empowerment as inherently good pursuits. While such arguments and aims may sound compelling to a civilian audience, they often fall on deaf ears within military organizations. The functional imperative of fighting and winning wars in defense of the nation remains too strong, and while military leaders might very well support the general notion of increasing gender equality in their society, the subject is simply not perceived as having anything to do with military operations. A "rights based" approach is therefore not likely to get the buy-in necessary from either key leaders or the broader organization. Instead, a better approach is to emphasize that the implementation process serves to strengthen the military in its constant pursuit of maximal effectiveness in its core tasks—that implementing gender perspectives is actually "the smart thing to do." While the aim of the process may indeed be more far reaching and also include change processes that have more to do with the implementation of the NAP, at the onset of implementation the aims should be kept limited. The reason for the limitation is to make sure that the process fits within the framework of the organization's core existing tasks, and thereby avoid some of the organizational resistance that is inevitable when aspiring to a more ambitious feminist agenda. In other words, gender perspectives should not be seen as an expansion of the military mandate, but rather as a way to improve the conduct and effectiveness of existing roles.

There is a great temptation to see these issues as add-ons, which then expands the role of the military into realms that military organizations are not particularly suited for. A study of Swedish gender advisors found that those who focused their work on advising internal personnel on gender issues had much greater impact than those who engaged in development and humanitarian projects among the local population. The internally focused advisors made sure that everyone in the staff and the operational units understood gender perspectives and that they could apply them in the conduct of operations; thereby having a substantial impact on the units' work. The externally focused advisors often had little internal influence, as the staff and the units felt that the gender advisor was taking care of the gender aspects of operations. Moreover, the development projects were often unsustainable and poorly executed, as they lacked the expertise and staying power of civilian actors.<sup>14</sup>

A central issue for feminists studying or promoting change is the extent to which "inside" or "outside" strategies are the most appropriate or effective. Diane Otto argues that the framework of UNSCR 1325 limits itself to "inside" strategies—working within mainstream institutional structures, rather than the activism and more radical work conducted outside the mainstream structures in a much more transformative or even revolutionary way.<sup>15</sup> Military organizations, as highlighted above, are not just potential protectors of women and civilians—they are also described as "the problem." Not only are military organizations often the perpetrators of some of the worst atrocities conducted in the midst of conflict,<sup>16</sup> but they also have more general problems highlighted by the high occurrence of sexual harassment and assault within and

around military garrisons in peacetime.<sup>17</sup> There is, in other words, an uneasiness with which feminists approach military organizations, and a doubt about whether working within the existing institutional and cultural structures of the armed forces is sufficient or even appropriate, or whether a more transformative, radical activist agenda from the outside is necessary to successfully implement UNSCR 1325 and the NAPs. If so, what should this transformative agenda entail and to what extent would it have an impact on the effectiveness of the organization in pursuing its core task—employing organized violence? In any case, based on the limited successes of women's rights activists trying to influence military organizations, as well as the contrasting success of the Swedish Armed Forces, where the change agents within the organization decided to drive the process as a military imperative,<sup>18</sup> this article promotes the inside strategy—working together with the organization and its leaders to create change from within.

Another tactical consideration is derived from the feminist debate about whether "gender balancing" (increasing female recruitment and representation) or "gender mainstreaming"<sup>19</sup> (achieving gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, and programs in all areas and at all levels) is the most effective and implementable approach to achieve organizational change. The most common assumption is that gender balancing is an easier and more implementable strategy than gender mainstreaming.<sup>19</sup> This is supported by the many cases of Western armed forces that have successfully increased the representation of women in the armed forces, but that at the same time

struggle to implement a gender perspective. Interestingly though, Annica Kronsell challenges this assumption by studying the cases of Sweden and the European Union. She notes that in those cases, mainstreaming has been easier than recruiting and promoting women.<sup>20</sup> It is indeed important to stress that there is a difference between sex and gender, and that women are not by definition gender aware, or promoters of gender equality. Indeed, few women have joined the military to become advocates of women's rights or gender equality. Instead, just as their male colleagues, they have signed up because they believe in the cause of defending the nation, and they are drawn to the profession and culture of the military organization. As a consequence, to successfully promote gender perspectives within military organizations, a gender-aware man may sometimes be equally or more effective than an unaware woman.

A debate related to that between mainstreaming and balancing is whether the implementation process should focus on specific gender-related functions or experts, such as Gender Advisors attached to regular units, or broader mainstreaming within the organization. The risk with specific functions or experts is what Diane Otto refers to as the "exile of inclusion." Not only are the specialists expected to conform to the existing culture and structure of the organization, they also risk becoming isolated within silos of pre-existing organizations or in separate institutions. The organization is thereby more likely to remain oblivious or "blind" to gender issues when the experts are absent.<sup>21</sup>

Again, pragmatic thinking and accurate timing is necessary. Given the size, complexity, and likely resistance of the organization, broader gender mainstreaming from the outset

is likely to be difficult. Specific gender functions in the form of experts and advisors are less than ideal for broader implementation of a gender perspective, but as early agents of change that serve to pave the road for broader change processes, they may be the only option. It should, however, be stressed that their specific functions should be seen as transition tools before the organization is ready for broader mainstreaming of gender perspectives.

The balance between specific functions and mainstreaming is related to yet another debate within the literature on gender and military organizations that addresses a more practical question of implementation in the field of operations. What is the most useful makeup of military "engagement teams," which have the purpose of meeting and addressing local women and children? Should they be all female or mixed? Can all-female engagement teams (FETs) obtain access to men in traditional societies as effectively as mixed engagement teams can? Does the sex of the interpreter matter when attempting to engage local men and women? All-female engagement teams, which have been used more extensively by the United States, have been the focus of much attention and discussion. A study of the Swedish case nevertheless found that the lessons from Afghanistan point toward the use of mixed gender teams as preferential to FETs.<sup>22</sup> One reason is that the number of female officers and soldiers remains low, and those available should therefore be used to form flexible mixed engagement teams that can interact more effectively with both local women and men. Mixed teams could also have the collateral effect of sensitizing the male team members. Moreover, a fully developed gender perspective should equally include male perspectives, which risk becoming lost in the



FET concept, just as women's perspectives are often lost in male-dominated organizations. The ideal would be to have gender diversity in all units to perform the necessary tasks. Either way, this means that more women must be recruited to the armed forces, in general, and to front line combat units, in particular.

### Challenging the Instrumental Approach

Gina Heathcote describes a more fundamental tension for feminists when studying military organizations: the very idea of employing military violence and force to "protect" women.<sup>23</sup> On one side are some early feminists who promote the use of force or intervention under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to protect or "save" women. On the other side are those who instead highlight the uneasy relationship

between women's rights, human rights, and humanitarian intervention, and who often criticize the early feminist's demands for the use of force to protect women in conflict zones.<sup>24</sup> For example, Anne Orford has described the use of military force, even when sanctioned or justified by law, as entrenching patriarchal and imperialist understandings of the role of law to "protect" and to "save."<sup>25</sup> The implementation of a gender perspective in military organizations is thereby inherently problematic for anti-militarist feminists, and is often seen as an instrumental interpretation of UNSCR 1325 and the NAPs that only seeks to increase military effectiveness and thereby support the patriarchal war system, rather than to transform or dismantle it.

One problem with an "instrumental" approach that stresses operational effectiveness



Spec. Kristina Tuluck/U.S. Army

A U.S. Army Staff Sergeant, with the aid of an interpreter, helps two local Afghan girls practice reading and spelling.

alone is that it may involve a more superficial remedy that does not explore the transformative potential of a gender perspective as rights-based arguments would. Feminists also highlight other risks involved in the instrumental approach.<sup>26</sup> One such risk is that the instrumentalist argument involves an essentialist view of women and their competences. If women are recruited as “peacemakers,” or for their oft-emphasized compassionate, diplomatic, or communicative skills, they are also most likely to play “character roles” within the organization where such skills are valued. In other words, within military organizations, women will be used to fill competence gaps (in most often what are perceived as non-essential and peripheral duties), rather than being allowed to impact the organization as a whole, or to compete with men on equal terms.<sup>27</sup>

Another important risk is the selective or “tokenistic” engagement of feminist or gender perspectives. Otto has effectively highlighted the weaknesses of UNSCR 1325 in addressing what feminists view as the key structural causes of women’s inequality, stressing conflict prevention more than rhetorically, and also the goal of general disarmament and anti-militarism.<sup>28</sup> Otto cites Sheri Gibbings who dejectedly concludes that “[t]he route to peace and ending war in this approach was no longer a reduction in military spending, but the integration of women and a gender perspective.”<sup>29</sup>

Carol Cohn takes the argument further by highlighting that the essentialist notion of “women-as-peacemakers” risks leaving the dominant political and epistemological frameworks of the war system untouched.<sup>30</sup> If Cohn is right in that many of the efforts to include women or a gender perspective fail to address the larger structural issues of a “masculine war

system,” two more risks naturally follow. First, there is a danger that feminist efforts are co-opted and used by the institutions for purposes that do not reflect the feminist agenda. This is particularly obvious when it comes to military organizations in which women can be used simply as tools for military victory. This debate is closely related to the problem of inside strategies discussed above. Or as feminist Audre Lorde effectively invoked the language of the U.S. civil rights movement by arguing that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”<sup>31</sup> Second, if the change processes only nibble at the edges of untouched structural problems they are unlikely to have much of an impact regardless of whether the aim is the empowerment of women or mere military effectiveness. If things go wrong, or if the changes do not live up to the expectations of increased effectiveness, the risk is that women or gendered approaches will be thrown out again.<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Jennings, for one, highlights this risk—especially since many of the claims regarding increased military effectiveness as a justification for increased women’s participation in peace operations have limited quantifiable empirical support.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Military organizations use force, or the threat of force, to achieve political aims. The *raison d’être* of military organizations is not to improve women’s right, but to defend the nation from military threats. While these facts make military institutions problematic partners for women activists, the often violent nature of the international system, and the prominent role that military organizations play within that system, are unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Thus, there are two reasons activists would be wise to work

with military organizations to implement UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plans. First, collaboration and increased awareness can help mitigate the unnecessarily negative impact that gender-insensitive military organizations can have in the field of battle and peace operations—ranging from abuse, prostitution, and missed opportunities in terms of intelligence, situational awareness, or improved relationships due to lack of contact with the female part of the local population, to an unconscious reduction of women’s security and power. The second reason is the fact that military institutions can also be a powerful and sometimes necessary force for good in order to protect civilians in general, and women in particular.

The nature of the military instrument nevertheless also creates limits to what we can expect in terms of implementing UNSCR 1325 and the NAPs. For example, a military approach is seldom the most appropriate way to increase women’s political participation, promote human rights, or democratic development. The aims of military organizations in the area of implementing UNSCR 1325 should therefore be tempered. While military organizations can play important roles by positively modifying their practices, and by providing the necessary stability in the area of operations for the more important actors to conduct their work, they should work in a supporting role, rather than in a leading one.

In the end, implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plans is important not only for the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality, it can also help military organizations maximize their operational effectiveness in a strategic context that demands local cultural understanding and great organizational diversity to tackle the often complex

tasks involved in stabilization. While military organizations generally have a culture that will resist the implementation of gender perspectives, the process of change is far from impossible. By starting from a solid understanding of and respect for the military organization and its core tasks, the change process can be placed within that framework in order to create buy-in from key change agents within the hierarchy. This also means that the initial focus of the implementation process should be on the organization’s core task—fighting—rather than on human resources issues of recruitment, career paths, and women’s rights. With time, the increased understanding of gender perspectives may indeed pave the way for more transformative and wide-ranging changes.

#### PRISM

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Resolution 1325 was adopted in October 2000. The text of the resolution can be found at <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Egnell, Petter Hojem, and Hannes Berts, *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change: The Swedish Model* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dandeker, "On the Need to be Different: Military Uniqueness and Civil-Military Relations in Modern Society," *RUSI Journal* 146, no. 3 (June 2001): 4–9.

<sup>4</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 269.

<sup>5</sup> For a useful summary see Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 240–243.

<sup>6</sup> Risa A. Brooks, "Making Military Might: Why Do States Fail and Succeed?," *International Security* 28:2 (Fall 2003), 149–191; Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For a useful discussion on the positive impact of women and gender perspectives see Sahana Dharmapuri, "Just add Women and Stir," *Parameters* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1011): 56–70.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 374.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Winslow, "Strange Bedfellows in Humanitarian Crisis: NGOs and the Military," in N. Mychajlyszyn, and T.D. Shaw (eds.), *Twisting Arms and Flexing Muscles: Humanitarian Intervention and Peacebuilding in Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 116.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, "Women in Peacekeeping" (undated), <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/womeninpk.shtml>>.

<sup>11</sup> See Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Anthony King "Women in Combat," *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 1 (2013): 4–11.

<sup>12</sup> Definition from the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted on July 18, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Egnell, Hojem, and Berts. *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Diane Otto, "The Exile of Inclusion: Reflections on Gender Issues in International Law

over the Last Decade," *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 10, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>16</sup> Kuehnast, de Jonge Oodrat, and Hernes (eds.), *Women & War: Power and Protection in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2011); Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> David S. Cloud, "Military is on the spot over sexual assaults," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2013, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-rape-military-20130605,0,7972535.story>>; Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military," (Arlington: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, 2010); Ann W. Burgess, Donna M. Slattery, and Patricia A. Herlihy, "Military Sexual Trauma: A Silent Syndrome," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 51, no. 2 (February 2013): 20–26.

<sup>18</sup> Egnell, Hojem, and Berts, *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change*.

<sup>19</sup> Kronsell, *Gender, Sex, and the Postnational Defense*, 135–136; See also Egnell, Hojem, and Berts, *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Otto, "The Exile of Inclusion."

<sup>22</sup> Egnell, Hojem, and Berts, *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change*, 93–94.

<sup>23</sup> Gina Heathcote, "Feminist Politics and the Use of Force: Theorising Feminist Action and Security Council Resolution 1325," *Socio-legal Review* 7 (2011).

<sup>24</sup> See Karen Engle, "'Calling in the Troops': The Uneasy Relationship among Women's Rights, Human Rights and Humanitarian Intervention," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 20 (March 2007): 189–226.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> See for example Diane Otto, "Power and Danger: Feminist Engagement with International Law through the UN Security Council," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 32 (June 2010): 97–121; and Johanna Valenius, "A Few Kind Women: Gender Essentialism and Nordic Peacekeeping Operations," *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 4 (2007): 510–523.

<sup>27</sup> See Valenius, "A Few Kind Women," 510; Kathleen Jennings, "Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations," 1.

<sup>28</sup> Otto, "Power and Danger," 107.

<sup>29</sup> Sherri Gibbings cited in Otto, "Power and Danger," 107.

<sup>30</sup> Carol Cohn, "Mainstreaming Gender in UN Security Policy: A Path to Political Transformation?," in *Global Governance: Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Shirin M. Rai and Georgina Waylen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 185–206.

<sup>31</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Sydney: Cross Press, 1984), 110.

<sup>32</sup> Jennings, "Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations," 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## Photos

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